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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that career paths into administration are different for men, and for women and minorities; as a result women and minorities may find themselves inadequately prepared for the administrative positions they assume. To examine the characteristics of some women in educational administration, an ethnographic study of three female, minority (Black, Hispanic, Native American) elementary school principals was conducted. The study focused on the interaction of leader characteristics, organizational structure, and the external environment. Both formal and informal procedures were used to collect data over a 3-week period. The principals' activities and interactions and their settings were recorded, and they were videotaped in interactions with faculty, staff, and students. Faculty, staff, and students were interviewed for their views of the principals' leadership characteristics. Finally, each principal was interviewed about her perceptions of her administrative style and philosophy of education, the school and school district, and her role as administrator. Category analysis (leadership behaviors, leader characteristics, environmental factors) showed two basic leader behaviors: task behaviors--direct one-way communication; and relationship behaviors--two-way communication involving listening, reinforcement, and encouragement. Personality characteristics for the three were limited in numbers of intraverted or dependent behaviors. Organizational and community constraints affected these administrators' perceptions of the treatment they received in acquiring and in carrying out the duties of their positions. (MCF)

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Minority Women in Administration: An Ethnographic Study

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During this century the number of women in administrative positions in the schools has declined dramatically. Contrary to expectations, men have retained their near monopoly of top positions in educational administration and have replaced women in some areas where women had gained a toehold, such as elementary principalships. In school administration, men are most likely to be found in positions with the greatest power, pay and prestige, and in those jobs requiring supervision of other males. For example, in 1976 women comprised 66 percent of all classroom teachers in the United States, but only 12.9 percent of all principals and assistant principals, and 5.4 percent of superintendents and assistant superintendents (Frasher & Frasher, 1979).

This pattern in education follows that of many other organizations; horizontal and vertical segregation of male and female jobs systematically limits opportunities for women, with the result that women form the bulk of the work force and men serve as bosses. The explanation for the situation may lie in the means by which organizations shape the behavior of members and by male hegemony in society as a whole.

Many researchers suggest that the absence of women in leadership positions is due to an interaction of sex role stereotypes, occupational sex typing, socialization and discrimination (Adkison, 1981). Research on leadership

styles demonstrates these biases with the blatant emphasis on males as leaders and little information available on female leaders. Nowhere is this omission more obvious than in the field of educational administration. A recent study by Ortiz (1981) provides information on the career patterns of women, men and minorities in public school administration. Ortiz suggests that career paths into administration are quite different for white males, women and minorities. Since the routes for minorities and women are not in a direct line, they find themselves inadequately prepared for the administrative positions they assume. The problems of limited managerial experiences and the lack of inside information on how the systems operate create an environment that is programmed for failure unless the minorities and females adapt to the expected model.

Review of Literature

Since there is a large body of information available on leadership styles in men, the research on female leadership usually utilizes those taxonomies of leadership behavior based on studies of male leaders. Therefore, the literature focusing on female leadership is at best confusing. A synopsis of the development of leadership theories may provide a structure for examining the effectiveness of women in leadership roles.

Until 1950 leadership theorists generally ascribed to the trait concept; that is a good leader is born, not made.

The trait theorists attempted to identify personal characteristics as determinants of good leadership (Jennings, 1961). Later, style theory began to replace trait theory as a more useful way of studying leadership effectiveness. Efforts to identify the one best style have been unsuccessful so, consequently, the identified styles follow along a continuum from authoritarian to democratic (Katz, Maccoby & Morse, 1975). Style research was forced into a comparative mode. For example, is female leadership behavior more autocratic or democratic than male behavior? More recently, the style theory has been expanded to include another determinant of effectiveness -- the situation (Fiedler, 1967: Riger & Galligan, 1980). Numerous factors have been identified as having moderating effects on leadership effectiveness including the interaction of personal characteristics, the nature of the job, the organizational structure, and the external environment (Barrow, 1977).

Along with the style research on women, the female trait theory studies reveal inconclusive results. Denmark & Diggory (1966) and Veiga & Yanouza (1970) discovered no differences between the ideal leader characteristics possessed by male and female leaders. Other studies (Bass, Krusell, & Alexander, 1971; Schein, 1975) suggested that managers were highly critical of women's supervisory abilities and that characteristics of successful managers

were more congruent with male than female characteristics. Interestingly, the style theory research (Eskilson & Wiley, 1966, Bartol & Butterfield, 1976) found commonalities between male and female leadership styles. Only three out of thirteen studies indicated a significant difference between male and female leadership styles. This may be due to the counsel in the past that women need to adopt a model of behavior that is essentially male in order to be successful (Riger & Galligan, 1980). Robie (1973) has suggested that characteristics associated with female sex roles might actually produce better outcomes in certain situations and Pascale & Athos (1981) urge women to seek employment with those companies who honor interdependence, a female attribute that produces group harmony. Currently, approaches to leadership that emphasize personality traits without considering situational factors have been abandoned as inconclusive (Riger & Galligan, 1980).

This ethnographic study attempts to look at minority female administrators from a situation-centered perspective which includes the interaction of leader characteristics, the nature of the job, the organizational structure, and the external environment. These are the contingencies that need to be studied to answer the questions of why so few minority women are found in positions of educational administration and what characteristics are possessed by some of the women who are in those positions. The answers to these questions

have implications for change at individual, organizational and broader social levels.

Overview

The design of the project was based on the assumption that the best evidence of female leadership styles will be found in the actual settings under conditions as near normal as possible. Ethnographic techniques to study the interactions of personal characteristics, the nature of the job, the organizational structure, and the external environment were used.

The collection of the ethnographic data was divided into two categories: informal and formal. The informal approach allowed the researchers to begin understanding the framework within which the subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings and actions. It also provided an opportunity to carefully note what the participants do when alone and what they do and say with others. The formal collection of data began only after rapport and trust had been established with all the participating members of the study.

In the first phase, three minority female administrators were asked to participate in the study. The three women were elementary school principals. One trained research assistant collected all the data including videotapes, recordings, journals, etc. The data was categorized according to Barrow (1977) in factors and subfactors:

1. Leader Behavior Factors
    a. Task emphasis behaviors
    b. Autocratic-restrictive behaviors
    c. Supportive-consideration behaviors
    d. Reinforcing behaviors
2. Leader Characteristic Factors
    a. Favorable personality characteristics
    b. Unfavorable personality characteristics
    c. Demographic and physical characteristics
    d. Structure and controlling orientation
    e. Technical and skill expertise
    f. Self-orientation
    g. Introversion-dependency orientation
3. Environmental Factors
    a. Organizational expectations and philosophy
    b. Organization and group characteristics
        - Group characteristics and social atmosphere
        - Organizational structure
        - External organizational influences
        - Influences of other groups or individuals
        - Leader's position power
    c. Subordinate characteristics
    d. Task characteristics (Barrow, 1977, p. 240)

Subjects

Several criteria were used in the selection of the subjects. These criteria included gender, ethnicity,

administrative status, location, proximity to researchers, and willingness to participate.

As mentioned earlier, based on the above criteria three female ethnic minority elementary principals were identified. The fact that all three administrators were at the elementary level is a reflection of the status of women administrators in education which limits the number of female secondary principals.

The three administrators were labeled A, B & C according to their sequence in the study. Administrator A is a Black female in her mid-fifties. She has been a resident of the community she serves for 30 years. She began her career as an elementary teacher, moved on to a position as school counselor, and has now been a principal at the same school for the past 5 years.

The school where administrator A is the principal, employs 17 teachers and has an enrollment of approximately 345 students. The students come mainly from middle income homes with a small percentage coming from either side of the financial spectrum. The students' ethnic composition is 62 percent Anglo, 25 percent Hispanic, 10 percent Black, the remaining Indian and Asian.

Administrator B is a Hispanic female in her mid-thirties. She is a native of the community she serves. Previous to becoming a principal she worked as an elementary teacher for 11 years. This is her first year as an administrator.

The school where administrator B is the principal employs 14 teachers and has an enrollment of 190 students. The students come mainly from middle income homes although there is an increasing population of low socioeconomic status students. The ethnic composition of the student population is 33 percent Hispanic, 65 percent Anglo, the remaining 2 percent is multiethnic due to the location of a university in the community.

Administrator C is a Native American female in her mid-forties. She is not a native of the community but has lived there for the past 20 years. Before becoming an administrator she was a teacher at the elementary level. This is her third year as a principal.

The school where administrator C is the principal employs 12 teachers and has an enrollment of approximately 160 students. The students come mainly from low socioeconomic homes with a small percentage from middle and high economic status homes. The ethnic composition of the student population is 43 percent Hispanic, 25 percent Native American and 32 percent Anglo.

The three communities where the schools are located can be described as small, rural and conservative. Although the ethnic composition of the students is varied, most of the teachers at the schools are white Anglo-Saxon females. Overall the ethnic composition of the students is not represented in the ethnic composition of the teaching staff.

Because all three principals have had extensive experience as elementary teachers, their philosophies of education are similar. All three feel that the main focus should be the child and that the education of the child should be holistic in nature. That is to say that the education of children should attend to all their needs: intellectual, physical and emotional.

Procedures

Once the three female administrators had been contacted, an informal meeting was held to discuss the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the time needed to accomplish all tasks. Each meeting was held separately, and the researchers together with the research assistant conducted the session.

The graduate assistant then proceeded to schedule and make all the necessary preparations on her own. Both researchers had held several meetings, training sessions and discussions with the graduate assistant before she began to collect the data.

The data were collected during a period of three weeks. One week was dedicated to each of the administrators. During a week, all procedures were the same for the three weeks, the graduate assistant "shadowed" the administrator recording in a journal all observed activities, interactions and settings. During a typical day data were gathered related to such routines as bus duty,

lunchroom supervision, interoffice communications, teacher conferences, parent teacher conferences and faculty meetings.

Additionally, each participant was videotaped in different situations while interacting with faculty, staff and students. Interviews were conducted and recorded which were used to gather data on faculty, staff and students' views on the administrator's leadership characteristics.

A formal oral interview was also conducted with each administrator in order to record their perceptions as to what was their administrative style, their philosophy of education and how they perceived their school/district setting as a whole and the role that they played as administrators.

Results

Most of the leadership behavior factors fell into two basic types: task behaviors, which were direct one-way communications explaining what each person has to do and when, where, and how it is to be done; and relationship behaviors which were supportive two-way communications involving listening nonevaluatively and using other types of reinforcement and encouragement.

The interraters tallied the number of times the leader behavior factors were exhibited and the number of times the leader characteristic factors were present. An interesting pattern of behaviors and characteristics emerge from the data.

Almost one half of the subjects' time is devoted to task behaviors. They spend that time on task with their faculty, staff and students in various situations. Committee meetings with the subjects as chairs require the administrators to assume the directive style of telling, asserting and modeling. Interactions with staff and students usually are in this mode.

Our subjects, however, during the rest of the time demonstrated supportive, considerate, and reinforcing behaviors. Few autocratic or restrictive incidents were recorded. Interviews with faculty, staff, and students portray the same profile -- the administrators are perceived to be good listeners, facilitators and participators.

Barrow's (1977) list of leader characteristic factors were used by the raters in coding the video tapes. Again there was a clear pattern of characteristics common to the three subjects. Few unfavorable personality characteristics were noted. In general most of the behaviors were rated as favorable personality characteristics (includes friendliness, etc.) with high numbers of professional and knowledgeable behaviors noted. Limited numbers of introverted or dependent behaviors were recorded.

Environmental factors which influence the subjects' behaviors are clearly evident. Ortiz (1981) stated that the behavior of the minority administrator is shaped by isolation from nonminority concerns, by the constraints that

the organizations impose on minorities and by the behavioral expectations male administrators hold for women. This study's three minority administrators are employed by organizations that are controlled by white males. They hold positions at a middle management level and while they may, on that level, be providing leadership, they probably are not involved in determining any substantial changes within the organization.

Additionally, the communities where the minority administrators live are conservative and reactionary. Most of the residents in two of the communities are in the middle income category with a small percentage on either side of the financial continuum. In one of the communities, sixty-two percent are Anglo, 25 percent Hispanic, 10 percent Black, while the other has no Black population, and the rest of the population is 33 percent Hispanic and 65 percent Anglo.

Although the third community varies somewhat in ethnic composition with 43 percent Hispanic, 25 percent Native American and 32 percent Anglo, it is still a small community and shares the same conservative and reactionary qualities.

Traditional roles for women are still customary and expected by the males in the communities. Conventional sex role stereotyping and sex role socialization practices are found in the schools and in the homes and male expectations influence the career choices of the women in the

communities. It is interesting to note that one of the three participants in our study was born and raised in the community; the other two were not. Their perceptions of how they were treated when they were acquiring the educational qualifications necessary for the administrative positions and the treatment they now receive differ according to ethnicity. The Hispanic felt that she had always been treated fairly and that she had never experienced discrimination, while the Black and the Indian reported many incidences of both sexism and racism. Since the Hispanic is a native of the area, it is possible that living in the environment for a long period of time creates immunity to issues of discrimination.

Discussion

Women's underrepresentation in administration cannot be explained in any one study. This study has produced data on three minority women administrators and those data represent only the tip of pyramids of information represented by each person.

Similarities in the leadership styles and the leadership characteristics give credence to the assumption that minority women have styles and characteristics which are in some way different from the male styles and characteristics that are reported in the literature. Women's better developed capacity for interdependence is one such difference and for minority women as well as Anglo

women this capacity may create a problem when they deal with their male bosses and colleagues.

Environmental factors such as the organizational structure impact on the behaviors of minority women and Anglo women. Verbal and nonverbal messages are transmitted and received through the interactions that occur throughout the day. Sex role stereotypes and power differences between the sexes in the outside world are reflected by the organizations. All of these influences can inhibit the natural or learned abilities of women in administration.

Many questions remain to be answered. There are no data available for a comparison between minority and Anglo women administrators in terms of style and characteristics. Further research is needed on differences in career paths of Hispanics and Blacks. Clearly needed is more information on styles of women administrators and their success or lack of success. Studies on the patterns of childhood and career socialization of minority women would help clarify the relationship of factors that influence women administrators.

In summary, this study is only the beginning of our search for answers about women administrators and their styles, characteristics and ability to survive.

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